

St. Louis Post-Dispatch

October 1, 2009

Section: Health

Meeting set for Missouri's stroke and heart attack care

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The statewide effort to get stroke and heart attack patients to the right hospitals as quickly as possible continues today with a public meeting to discuss the new emergency system expected to launch next year.

Missouri's "Time Critical Diagnosis System" for heart attack and stroke was created by a state law that passed last year and is considered to be the first of its kind in the country.

People in Missouri die of heart disease and strokes at higher than average rates, which doctors attribute to unhealthy lifestyles and lack of access to health care.

Under the system, ambulances and medical helicopters could bypass closer hospitals for designated stroke and heart attack centers that are better suited for the most seriously ill patients. Hospitals would be divided into four categories of care based on their staffing, capabilities and equipment, similar to the trauma system that is already operating. Hospitals will have to apply for their state heart attack and stroke designations.

Patients diagnosed in the field with a heart attack will be taken to hospitals with the ability to quickly perform artery-opening surgeries.

With strokes, patients need intravenous clot-busting drugs within three hours before permanent brain damage can set in. Only certain hospitals are certified in the treatment.

Funding for the project comes to the state through grants from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the nonprofit Missouri Foundation for Health.

Two public meetings to discuss the project will be held from 4 to 5:30 p.m. and from 5:30 to 7 p.m. today at the St. Louis Public Library, Schlafly Branch at 225 North Euclid Avenue. Refreshments will be provided and there will be an opportunity to submit comments.

For more information on the time critical diagnosis system, visit 360365.org